Anglican Diocese of Christchurch

AnglicanLife eMagazine - Light in the Darkness

From Bishop Peter Carrell

The theme '**Light in the Darkness**' for this magazine was set down some time ago. It is always relevant to human life. But in this first part of 2026, with a new dimension to war in the Middle East unfolding, following terrifying slaughter of protestors in Iran, ongoing violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians on the West Bank, conflicts elsewhere in the world somewhat obscured by the latest headlines, a sharper relevance to this theme provokes us to prayer and reflection.

Our **prayer** in the midst of darkness has the confidence that we pray through the Light of the World to the God who is **Light**. We pray emboldened by the great promise of John 1:5, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Our **reflection** on this theme must be **honest**. There is darkness in this world. Understandably in many situations we want to believe the best of other people, that people are inherently good and will respond with kindness to kindness. But that is not an appraisal of the human condition that takes us very far when monsters roam the world. In all too many cases, some monsters become rulers of nations with armies and weapons of destruction at their disposal. There are other forms of darkness in our world. What does it mean that light shines in the darkness of our world, whether that darkness is in the form of war or abuse, or poverty, or despair, or disease?

First, the light that shines is the **light of Christ**: he has come into our world, experienced its darkness, yet shone a bright light of truth, of hope, of peace and of love into our world. The light of Christ continues to shine because he overcame sin and death on the cross, and rose again to new, victorious life.

Secondly, that light shines wherever we fulfil **our vocation to also be "light of the world"** (Matthew 5:14). We fulfil this vocation when we live out through our lives, our words and our deeds, the truth of the Good News of Jesus Christ, being Christ-like agents of hope, peace and love in our world.

As we journey once again through Lent with Jesus to the cross, and celebrate the resurrection of Christ from the dead, we witness to the truth that "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." May our prayer through 2026 be that the light of Christ **shines** everywhere through Christians, even in the darkest corners of the earth.

+Peter.

Light in the Darkness

Yvette Koo Butcher — March 24th, 2026

"In the beginning was the Word... the Word was with God... the Word was God... in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:1, 4-5, NRSVA)

Welcome to our Easter Anglican*Life* electronic magazine.

In this autumn edition of our Anglican*Life* magazine, we explore the theme of 'Light in the Darkness'. This light is the **light of Christ** that shines through us. As the darkness in our world seems to increase, the light of Christ in us shines.

It is our hope that as you read each article (there are only 10), you will be encouraged as you are 'the light of the world' (Matthew 5:14), and **God is with you** always:

> "Arise, shine; for your light has come,
> and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
> For darkness shall cover the earth,
> and thick darkness the peoples;
> but the Lord will arise upon you,
> and his glory will appear over you.
> Nations shall come to your light,
> and kings to the brightness of your dawn. " (Isaiah 60:1-3, NRSVA)

As we head towards Holy Week, we remember Christ Jesus as Son of God and Son of Man who lived a sinless life. Our Lord Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day (Easter Sunday), **Jesus rose again** from the tomb - no longer dead but alive.

> "In the beginning was the Word... the Word was with God... the Word was God... in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:1, 4-5, NRSVA)

We can rejoice in our Lord Jesus' ultimate victory over darkness (sin and death). In the meantime, we continue to meet with other followers of Christ during the week: we pray together; go to Eucharist in our local parishes; we sing and listen; worship and reflect; praise the Lord and encourage one another; serve and minister to each other; do 'housekeeping' i.e. tasks and chores in the parish; and catch up over a cuppa.

Lastly, a song comes to mind, **'Christ Be Our Light'** (YouTube video: 3 mins 54 sec), and I hope the lyrics will strengthen your walk with the Lord, and with others.

Part of our weekly prayer is asking the Lord to regenerate every person and parish in our Diocese, and to grow us in faith and in unity. Let us pray:

As the kōtuku gently rests upon the tree,

Come and rest upon us, Holy Spirit as

we pray for the regeneration of our Diocese.

Everliving God,

through Your Spirit You constantly renew the whole creation;

bring regeneration to your Diocese of Christchurch,

grant us courage to grow disciples of Jesus,

give us vision to reach young people and their families,

and strengthen us to create vibrant communities of faith.

All this we ask in Jesus' name,

Amen.

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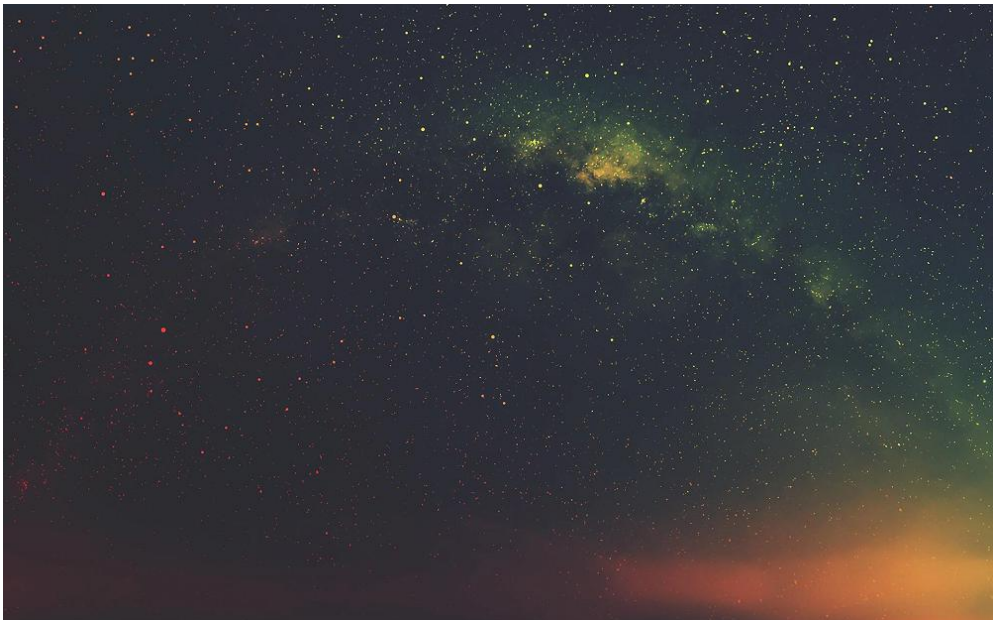


Being Light in the Darkness

Words: Dean Ben Truman

This is a sermon by Dean Ben Truman on Ash Wednesday at the Transitional Cathedral.

> "You groped your way through that murk once, but no longer. You're out in the open now. The bright light of Christ makes your way plain. So no more stumbling around. Get on with it! The good, the right, the true—these are the actions appropriate for daylight hours. Figure out what will please Christ, and then do it." Ephesians 5:8-10 (The Message).

Darkness is the norm of the universe.

I'm not a physicist, but Google tells me that (depending on how you count it), the universe is somewhere between 95% and 99.9999999% dark, empty nothingness. It's pretty cold out there too, averaging -270°C, just above absolute zero.

Sure, if you took a cosmic joy-ride, every few million light years or so you might stumble into a patch of light we call a galaxy, with some clumps of solid material and a few gaseous balls circling around a central star, but mostly our universe is just cold, dark, empty nothingness*. There are unimaginable distances between celestial bodies within a galaxy, but the space between galaxies is even larger, accounting for about 80% of the total volume of the universe.

Cosmically speaking, tangible material is but a rounding error and light is a miracle.

I've found that a helpful reminder this year. By grace we live in this bubble of light and life. More than that, by grace we find ourselves living in this paradisical Diocese, never far from majestic mountains, sustaining water, meditative waves, prodigal natural beauty. And for a person of my age (40yo), we have lived through one of the most geopolitically peaceful and stable eras in human history.

I don't want to be a buzzkill, but this year our pale blue dot has felt a little darker.

Our globalised world feels a little more fragile than I can remember. Economically fragile as costs continue to rise and trade tariffs are reintroduced. Meteorologically fragile as the earth heats beyond sustainable levels leading to increased frequency and severity of adverse weather events (a great euphemism for deadly storms). Geopolitically fragile as immigration issues abound leading to far-right nationalist groups rising in the poles and xenophobia rearing its ugly head. The 'rules-based-order' is being cast aside by global superpowers who seem to want to carve the world up into spheres of influence ruled by them in mafia-like fashion.

Darkness, it seems, is the norm of the universe.

And here we find ourselves in the seasons of Lent and Easter, which I think offer us an antidote to such despair. Our central story, the great truth of the universe is that "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:5, NRSVA)

But like all good stories, we need to go on a journey before we understand its conclusion.

And our starting point, in Lent, is an acknowledgement of the darkness.

It begins with a black smear on the forehead and words of stark reminder – "Dust you are, and to dust you shall return." We take time to remember our own physical and spiritual frailty, facing our own fallenness and acknowledging to God and to ourselves the ways in which we contribute to the darkness of the world. One of the practices I've found useful is sitting with a form of self-examination based on the seven deadly sins where each sin is broken down further into sub-categories. Wrestling with our shadows is deeply uncomfortable!

But if we wish to reflect the Divine light, as the moon does for the sun, we've got to wash the soot from our faces.

It all leads to the Cross. The darkest point in human history. The pit of darkness deeper even than the universe itself.

But then, blinding light bursts forth from the tomb.

Darkness may be the norm of the universe, but light is stronger yet.

The world still feels like it's getting dark. And I wouldn't be surprised if a few more bulbs flicker out in the coming decades. But the slain Lamb sits enthroned, ensuring entropy doesn't get the last laugh. We are a resurrection people, and "Alleluia!" is our song. We are the people who have spent our Lent polishing ourselves that we may reflect something more of His brilliance. We are those carrying tongues of flame above our heads. As Paul reminds us in Ephesians 5:8 (NIV), "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light."

*Yes, I know, it's mostly dark matter, but let's ignore that for the sake of the metaphor.

Update from the Christ Church Cathedral Reinstatement Project

Cathedral Reinstatement Project — March 4th, 2026

Words: Carolyne Grant, CCRL Project Director + Photos: Heather Joy and CCRL

The new plan to re-open Christ Church Cathedral as unveiled in September was met with great support from across the city. Several new donations were received, which was very encouraging, and we set about the work needed to make the adjusted approach deliverable, so we can start work later this year.

The Re:Opening plan restores the western façade of the Cathedral, including the rose window, its tower and the nave, reviving the city's iconic landmark. The tower will attract tourists and generate operating revenue for the church to run the Cathedral. Once open it will operate at no cost to the city, a gift for all.

The Christchurch City Council has told us that a plan to revitalise Cathedral Square is a priority and that an accessible Cathedral is an important part of that.

A vision of how the cathedral could look. — Image by: CCRL

Our plan costs $90-95m to complete. We are confident we have access to $50m which includes the further commitment from the Church. We need to bridge the $40-45m funding gap (over four years), and continue to explore **all** sources of funding to do so.

The Council is seeking feedback on prioritising funding to restore four iconic buildings including Christ Church Cathedral. As a result, we will appreciate any contribution from the Iconic Buildings Fund initiative.

We continue to strive for the Cathedral to be open to all. We want to remove the hoardings to the north, south, and west, to return Cathedral Square to locals and visitors. An open and accessible Cathedral will attract and invigorate business investment and help rejuvenate Cathedral Square. We are asking our community to help us do this.

Christ Church Cathedral is undeniably a building of national significance and the centrepiece of our civic space. It is also an economic driver for Cathedral Square and the city which has almost completed its celebrated rebuild.

Visitors looking at Pete Majendie's artwork exhibition in Christ Church Cathedral. — Image by: Heather Joy

Over the last 18 months we have welcomed over 12,000 visitors and with them their stories and memories. It has been a reminder of the part this building has played in the city's history and why it is important to bring it back for everyone. This month, we will invite hundreds more in, both to see our progress and to share their stories and questions.

Pet Week at Christ Church Cathedral. — Image by: Heather Joy

The recent Open Weekend follows a series of activations we shared during the pause in construction: An art exhibition described as "a love letter to the city"; liturgical services followed by ANZAC Day with our Cathedral illuminated in red to commemorate New Zealand's fallen during service; a Matariki celebration, illuminating the city's most iconic heritage building; NZ Opera's lead soprano performing the first aria of *La bohème* (it was breathtaking); The King's Singers; Mission Trees; and Woolston Brass. We also lit the city's icon in pink for the Breast Cancer Global Illuminations Campaign, and we even hosted Pet Week at the Cathedral!

NZ Opera's lead soprano, Australian-Italian soprano Elena Perroni performing the first aria of La bohème. — Image by: Heather Joy

There is great joy in keeping the Cathedral's heart beating. We have done all of this at no cost to the project, but through the generosity of sponsors and supporters who want to see the Cathedral reopen, and Cathedral Square returned to locals and visitors to our city. We have also regularly run paid tours to generate some further funds for the reinstatement.

Sir Tony Robinson upon entering Christ Church Cathedral with Dean Ben (left). — Image by: H

Most recently, Cathedral Square Unearthed brought 1,500 visitors over the course of a week. We were delighted to welcome Sir Tony Robinson to the project to see that exhibition. We will leave the last word to him:

> *"Coming here shortly after the earthquake and witnessing the wreckage, now thinking that only a few years later I'd be able to return and see the church risen so majestically from the rubble! Bravo! Congratulations!"*
> *— Sir Tony Robinson*

Help cbm Give the Miracle of Sight in Nepal

Words: Dr Murray Sheard + Photos: **cbm** New Zealand (Christian Blind Mission)

> *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." – John 8:12*

Childhood in darkness

Dipendra is a brave boy. In his steep valley in Nepal – hazardous for a child who cannot see – he never complained as his sight faded. His parents did not realise he was becoming blind. His father, Man Bahadur, left before dawn to work as a day labourer, unaware his son could barely see.

He kept going to school, squinting at the blackboard as the letters melted together, thinking that was how the world looked for everyone. In the world's poorest places, many children have their vision stolen by cataracts. Faces blurring. Words becoming impossible to read.

His teacher noticed him leaning too closely into his book and, worried for his future, reached out through local contacts. Soon, a **cbm**-funded field worker named Krishna – supported by friends like you – climbed the steep hillside to reach Dipendra's village.

Krishna examined Dipendra's eyes. He had cloudy cataracts in both eyes, likely from birth. Paying for surgery would cost more than his family could earn in a year. Without help, Dipendra would spend his life blind.

Journey to hope

Dipendra's Miracle of Sight journey began on the back of a motorbike – the only transport that could reach his valley. Then came a long, uncomfortable bus ride. Away from home, the bright Himalayan sun became a painful haze.

Their destination was Biratnagar, on the southern plains near the Indian border. For a child from a quiet mountain valley, the crowded streets and noise were overwhelming. Virtually blind, he held tightly to his father as they made their way toward an oasis of care supported by people like you: the Biratnagar Eye Hospital.

This hospital is a blessing to countless children and adults losing their sight across Nepal – and even from India.

A skilled team

Inside the children's ward, nurses examined Dipendra's eyes. His cataracts were dense and white: in his left eye two-thirds of his sight was blocked; in his right, even more. Despite this loss, his surgeon, Dr Pawan, was optimistic. "I am expecting good vision after cataract surgery," he said. He performs multiple operations each day, bringing the Miracle of Sight to many at low cost.

As Dipendra was slightly older, a local anaesthetic was agreed to by his father. Dipendra was nervous but determined. Early the next morning, he changed into his maroon hospital gown. "You are a brave boy," an eye technician encouraged him.

Lying perfectly still and awake, he underwent two successful surgeries. The blinding cataracts were removed, and clear new lenses were placed before soft pads and green covers were taped across his face. Each time, his father sat beside him, thanking God for the friends in New Zealand whose generosity made this possible.

A new world of light

Each morning after surgery, Dipendra waited eagerly for the nurse to lift the tape from his eyes. After each procedure, light flooded in: sharper shapes, brighter colours. He could see the nurse's smile and his father's grateful tears.

"Yes!" he whispered. "I can now see clearly – from both my eyes!"

The nurse held up her fingers. Three, then two, then four. Dipendra got each test right. Soon he was ready to leave, proudly wearing ultra-dark glasses to protect his new vision.

His father was overwhelmed. "I am very happy the cataracts have been removed from my son's eyes. I am very grateful for all your support." Without caring hearts like yours, this could never have happened. Dipendra's future is bright now. He will be able to live independently and shape his own life.

But in places like Nepal, many children are still waiting for surgery, trapped in the painful blur of cataract blindness.

Your gift brings sight

Please, if you can, send your Miracle of Sight gift today. Your gift will help find children and adults with treatable blindness and support **cbm**-funded hospitals like Biratnagar to perform gold-standard surgery.

Thank you for offering the Miracle of Sight and shining the light of Christ into the world's poorest places. Your kindness will bring sight for a lifetime to more brave adults and children like Dipendra.

No longer blinded by cataracts, he says, "I can see clearly! Now I realise how blurred my sight was. I am very happy."

Please prayerfully consider making a gift today by visiting **www.cbmnz.org.nz/dipendra/** or phoning **0800 77 22 64** to donate securely.

Thank you for your generosity to transform the lives of children and adults with disabilities in the world's poorest places. May God bless you and your loved ones.

Dr Murray Sheard, CEO of cbm New Zealand (Christian Blind Mission)

Born again

Andrew Butcher — March 4th, 2026

Words: Rev'd Dr Andrew Butcher

This is a sermon by Rev'd Dr Andrew Butcher on Sunday, 1 March for the second Sunday of Lent at St Barnabas, Fendalton Parish.

"Yvette and I nearly went to North Korea. I say nearly, in the sense that it was so near that we could see it, and that it was so near that all we needed to do was head down into a steep tunnel and, if the other end hadn't been blocked, we'd have eventually surfaced in North Korea. We didn't, though, get very far down that tunnel. We both felt quite claustrophobic – only a small fear in comparison to those who actually did escape, using the opposite route usually, from North to South.

But it also felt quite strange. From the surface we could look out from our vantage point and there was North Korea. That vantage point was a short bus drive from Seoul, where we were staying.

Several months ago, perhaps even longer, one of our parishioners gave me free advice at the door as she left the service. It’s an occupational hazard as a priest to receive free advice at the door at the end of any service! I've even occasionally been given free food, and once a free fig tree [and that featured in a whole different sermon] – but on this occasion it was very specific free advice. She suggested, seriously I might add, that I should quote Plato more often in my sermons.

I did one philosophy paper at university, most of which I have forgotten. But you can’t get very far in philosophy of any kind, even the theological kind, without coming across Plato. And so it can never be said I don't listen to advice, free or otherwise, I shall say a little here about Plato. Or, at least, I shall use one of his stories.

In Plato's book The Republic, he describes the experience of being in a deep cave, one that slopes downwards at an angle. Near the bottom of the cave are a group of people. The people are facing the back wall of the cave at its deepest point. Above and behind them, nearer the cave entrance, is a fire, which provides all the light in the cave. Between the people's backs and the fire is a puppeteer. The puppeteer moves around puppets depicting animals, plants and other things, and these shadow images are reflected on the back wall, which becomes like a cinema screen. This is the only reality the people in the cave know.

Now, suppose one of the people down in the cave were to get up – or to be picked up. Either way, suppose that person somehow made their way all the way up to the entrance of the cave. Three things would almost immediately happen to them.

First, they'd be practically blinded by the overwhelming light, having always previously lived with next to no light at all.

Second, they'd be overwhelmed to discover that the reality of the world outside the cave far exceeded the reality of the cave by any imaginable measure.

Third, they would instantly and painfully begin the process of renarrating the history of their own lives and the nature of reality in the light of this wholesale new experience of the way things really are. [1]

I don't think I would have made sense of this story until almost visiting North Korea but in retrospect I can now make a little sense of it. In our case, we were heading away from the light and into the darkness of a tunnel.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. When it's dark. He's asking probing questions. At face value, as a scholar, he's asking intellectual questions. But I'd suggest these are more than just indulging his intellectual curiosity.

I remember some years ago going to a seminar by a visiting Oxford University professor who is a specialist in her field. As questions came from the floor after her address, she batted them away with this extraordinary intellectual rigour and dexterity, seemingly unflappable and very sure about her intellectual footing.

Had Nicodemus wanted to show off his academic credentials, he would have done so in public. That's not what he's doing here.

To use Plato's metaphor, Nicodemus was seeing the light emanating from the top of the cave and was curious about it. He saw in Jesus something he had not seen in anything else before, not in his studies, not amongst the esteemed company of other scholars, not in the great libraries of his time, not in the great debates. He had seen the light, and he was emerging from the darkness of his own cave.

Jesus introduces Nicodemus to the light outside the cave. He is inviting Nicodemus to study Jesus himself. For in Jesus, we see God's divinity most fully revealed; we see the Holy Spirit; we see God's purpose is to lift us up, lift us out of the cave so we, in imitating his example, may lift others up too.

Nicodemus reappears later in John's Gospel, in John 19:39. There we see him bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes. There, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths. And they laid Jesus in the darkness of a cave-like tomb.

But we are not back in Plato's Cave.

And Nicodemus is not cowering in the darkness anymore.

For soon we mark Jesus being lifted up.

That is the arc of the story of all who follow Jesus.

Jesus, in his incarnation, ministry, resurrection and ascension is the new shape, the new story, the new light, of this new life we are given.

Through him, we are risen into his glory.

By him, we are given new life.

In him, we are born again.

May this be our Lenten journey too.

Amen."

[1] Sam Wells, Feb 17 Born Again 2

An Easter Reflection for a City in Need

Corinne Haines — March 4th, 2026

Words: Corinne Haines, City Missioner + Photo: Ewan Sargent

Good Friday is a time of darkness, when we remember the suffering, the injustice, and the trauma of the crucifixion of Christ.

It is a day when we are consumed by the memory of his suffering, by the grief of those who witnessed the event, and by the injustice dealt to Jesus. It was a time of darkness, of despair, where we are reminded that the actions of others were unfair, where hope seemed far away, and where the reality of the event was overwhelming.

But we know now that darkness is not forever, because on the third day those supporters of Christ witnessed his resurrection and light overcame the darkness.

For those who come to the Christchurch City Mission for support, their time of darkness is the reality of the cold and homeless nights, the despair of the empty pantry with no food for the family, the struggles of coping with mental health issues, the loneliness and isolation of the elderly, the worry or the never-ending struggle to balance the family finances in a cost-of-living crisis.

The Mission staff deal with this time of darkness every day as they support those who come for help. They sit and listen to people who are dealing with loss, trauma, and times of extreme hardship. The Mission staff accompany them through this difficult and bleak time in their lives.

We work to show that even in these darkest of moments, there is hope and light and that our

staff can support them to find solutions – their resurrection. When we find a house, give them food, we listen and stand with them in their time of need, then we show that the Mission and the community who support the Mission are working with them.

We work to restore dignity in their lives. We add light to their lives, a sign that life can be rebuilt, that the future can be different, and they don't need to face that alone. A single moment of hope with our staff can lead to transformation, a single moment of hope and light means that the darkness can be lifted from their lives.

Our work at the Mission, of removing darkness and bringing light into their lives gives evidence that we care, that life can improve, and that in the toughest challenges there can be positive change. Small acts of compassion are important, and each small act pushes back the darkness to bring in light – a sign that life can be rebuilt and that the future can be different from the past.

At the Mission we are called to be light in the darkness, to be part of the change in their lives, to not let the past darkness define their journey. The Easter message assures us that even the smallest glimmer of light gives hope because the darkness cannot overcome it.

In Darkness and in Light

Helen Peters — March 3rd, 2026

Words: Helen Peters

A common way for Christians to begin the celebration of Easter is with the lighting and carrying of the Paschal candle into the darkened church at the Easter Vigil, during the night leading into Easter Day. The words "The Light of Christ" ring out. We all reply, "Thanks be to God." The light grows as the candles each of us carry are lit from this Easter flame. The Light of Christ spreads among us. This light spreads beyond the church walls as we carry Christ's light into the world.

Image by: Red Nguyen (pexels.com)

The Easter season is rich in this image of light and darkness. Light is one of the most powerful and recurrent images we use to describe God. Light and darkness leap out in prayers and songs, hymns and writings, and in the liturgies of the Church Year. At Christmas we rejoice in the incarnation of the Light of the World. At every baptism we say, "Shine with the Light of Christ."

Light and darkness are woven into the Scriptures from the beginning to the end. A favourite verse of mine expresses the constancy of God's light and presence:

> *"If I say, 'Let the darkness cover me, and my day be turned to night,' the darkness is no darkness with you, but the night is as clear as the day, for darkness and light to you are both alike."* (Psalm 139:11-12, ANZPB p. 363)

This psalm is also the source of a well-loved Taizé chant:

> *"In our darkness, there is no darkness - with You, Oh Lord! The deepest night is clear as the day."*

The Benedictus/The Song of Zechariah is another beautiful example:

> *"In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace."* (Luke 1:78-79, ANZPB pp. 39-40)

When people find life bleak, we can be God's hands, and feet, and voice for them. We can reach out to others and, through kindness and caring, we help to share the Light of Christ.

When life seems bleak for us, it can be hard to believe that there is hope and light. But God's love and care are always there, holding and guiding us. If we feel lost or sad, God's light and love are still surrounding us.

Prayers we know by heart can remind us of God's love, hope, and light, and support us in our dark times. This prayer below from our New Zealand Prayer Book is one example.

> "In darkness and in light,
>
> in trouble and in joy,
>
> help us, heavenly Father,
>
> to trust your love,
>
> to serve your purpose,
>
> and to praise your name,
>
> through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." (ANZPB, p. 51)

I have rewritten this as a prayer for children and for the child in each of us:

"God is with me every day,

as I go along my way.

God is with me every night,

I am always in God’s sight.

Thank you, God for your love and care,

always with me everywhere.

May I know you're there when I am sad

and give you thanks when I am glad.

Thank you for sending Jesus your Son
to give good news to everyone.

I know that I am God's child too

whatever happens, that's always true.

Jesus be my friend and guide.

I know you're always by my side.
Amen." (Helen Peters)

Jesus or Barabbas – Who would You Have Chosen?

Edwin Boyce — February 17th, 2026

Words: Edwin Boyce

As a Jew you have come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, that foundational event in your history when the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt. The population of the city, normally only tens of thousands, has swelled to several hundreds of thousands. The streets are filled with a sense of anticipation, tension, and religious significance.

The Romans have controlled the region for nearly a century, ever since General Pompeii

besieged the city. With Tiberius Caesar Augustus ruling as Roman Emperor for more than forty years, unrest during this time will be met with severe consequences. Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, has travelled from his residence in Caesarea Maritima to Jerusalem, and brought additional troops with him to maintain order and suppress any potential disturbances.

The priestly robes that will be worn at the Passover celebration are kept under guard in the Antonia Fortress. The priests have previously requested that the Governor release them, highlighting tension between Roman authority and Jewish religious practice.

You are in the crowd outside the praetorium, the official court of the Roman Governor. You are there because it is the custom during Passover for a prisoner to be freed, and the Governor is about to ask the crowd to decide who it should be. The choice will be between Jesus of Nazareth, who is reported to have said he is the Son of God, and Jesus Barabbas, a name that means son of the father. The Nazarene Jesus is a rabbi who has been teaching in public and healing the sick. Barabbas is a known insurrectionist and murderer. Who will be chosen, Jesus or Barabbas?

The chief priests and elders are agitating the crowd, urging them to demand the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus. They say this Jesus is guilty of claiming divine authority, challenging temple authority and undermining their authority. The atmosphere is chaotic with heated debates and overwhelming noise. Just days ago, many in the same crowd had heralded Jesus of Nazareth's entrance into Jerusalem, but now they are being told to call for his death.

Pilate calls for silence. He addresses the crowd, declaring that he has found Jesus of Nazareth to be innocent – innocent that is of subverting the nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and claiming to be King of the Jews. The priests and elders have reframed their case to Pilate – political, not religious – so that it will be taken more seriously. Claiming to be King of the Jews, under Roman Law, is sedition and treason – crimes punishable by death.

You look at Barabbas – what do you see? Is he a captive insurrectionist and murderer or a national hero, a freedom fighter, someone willing to act rather than preach, someone willing to fight to free the region from Roman oppression? He carries himself like a man used to violence. His shoulders are broad, his movements restless even with chains at his wrists. His hair is unkempt, his beard thick and untrimmed. There are old scars on his forearms – he has the look of someone who has pushed back. He lifts his head, his eyes flash, not shame, not fear, but anger.

You look at Jesus – what do you see? He stands a little apart, though the soldiers keep him firmly in place. He does not look like a rebel. There is no wildness in his eyes. No defiance in the set of his jaw. He has clearly been beaten. His face is swollen on one side. There is dried blood at the edge of his hairline. A cloak hangs loosely over his shoulders and bears the marks of scourging, and you can see where the fabric sticks to his skin. Yet he stands upright. There is something unsettling about his stillness. He is not pleading. He is not shouting his innocence. He does not look around for sympathy. His eyes move slowly across the crowd – not accusing, not begging. Instead, he looks resolute; sorrowful, perhaps, but not afraid.

On one side stands a man who bled for striking Rome, who looks as if he would do it again. On the other side stands a man beaten yet calm, speaking of love of enemies and a kingdom not of this world. One looks dangerous but familiar; the other looks powerless but strangely composed.

If you choose Barabbas, you choose a man who fights the oppressor the way you understand fighting. If you choose Jesus, you choose a man who refuses to fight at all. You look at Barabbas. There is strength there – but also fury. You look again at Jesus' face. There is pain there – but no hatred.

You must decide what kind of deliverance you believe in. It will be a choice that has always been made, and will always be made, wherever and whenever crowds are stirred by fear, anger, or grievance. Do you choose the figure who channels your outrage and promises strength through confrontation, or do you choose the voice that calls for costly reconciliation, restraint, and moral courage? Do you side with the crowd that chooses the leader who feels powerful rather than the one who embodies truth? Such decisions shape not only this event, but the moral character of a people for all time.

Who do you choose?

Light in the Darkness

Jenny Wilkens — March 4th, 2026

Words: Reverend Jenny Wilkens

One afternoon I visited a friend, Lisette at her apartment, and she ushered me into a long corridor which was completely dark with no lights on. I fumbled my way along the corridor behind her, while Lisette who was blind, confidently led the way, negotiating her way around a box in the middle of the floor. I was tempted to move it out of the way, but she said, "Leave it there, I know exactly where it is then." This was a salutary experience for me, of someone who was not afraid of the dark and could lead me safely through.

Much of our imagery in the Scriptures and in Christian theology draws on the equation of light with good and positivity. We love the image of Jesus as 'the light of the world' (John 8:12), and light candles to express God's presence with us in the darkness. John's Gospel in particular plays with images of light and darkness, with powerful stories of Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night (John 3), the Samaritan woman at the well coming to faith in Jesus in the full light of day (John 4), Jesus healing the man who was born blind, who shows more spiritual insight than the religious leaders who are still 'in the dark' (John 9).

But the counterpoint of this polarising things into light and dark can be that we only see light/white as good, and dark/black as bad and the colour of sin and evil. I must admit to cringing a little when I see some depictions of the gospel message which use different colours to tell the story, and usually talk about sin as black.

What message does this give to people of colour, particularly in this current climate of increasing tensions in our world about race, immigration, and refugees? Perhaps we can think a bit more creatively about the colours and imagery we use in ministry with children and young people, and in our liturgy, worship, and preaching this Easter.

My encounter that day with Lisette leading me through the darkness took me to a rich exploration of theology from the perspective of a blind person, John Hull's short book In the Beginning There Was Darkness: A Blind Person's Conversations with the Bible (SCM Press: 2001). Being seriously short-sighted myself, I found it fascinating to look again at Bible verses like Psalm 139:12 where the Psalmist says of God that "even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you".

The prophet Isaiah also gives us pause to ponder. In Isaiah 45:7, "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity", expresses God's sovereignty in using even Cyrus, a secular world leader to achieve God's purposes. In Isaiah 45:3, Cyrus is promised "treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name."

This passage in Isaiah has sometimes been interpreted to teach us that God can give us the ‘treasures of darkness’ in times of darkness, hiddenness, suffering or uncertainty in our own lives and spiritual journeys. Such times in our lives are uncomfortable places to be, but can be times of great learning and growth, if we are willing to stay with God in the darkness and uncertainty, to wait on God, who is not uncomfortable in the dark and can find the way forward. This is the power of Holy Saturday when we wait and watch with Jesus in the darkness of the tomb, before he brings us to the light and joy of Easter Day.

The 16th century Spanish mystic St John of the Cross talked of the ‘dark night of the soul’, of the experience of feeling distant from or bereft of God, of feeling the absence rather than the presence of God. But rather than signifying a loss of faith, this can be the time to seek a wise spiritual guide who has been there before and who can help us, now stripped down of our external defences and feelings, to take a deeper step of faith and trust in God. Just as Lisette led me confidently down the corridor in the dark, so a Christian mentor who is a bit ahead of us on the journey can help us to turn that initial discomfort of being in the dark with God, into discovering those hidden treasures of darkness God wants to give us there.

The song, Waymaker was first written by a Nigerian woman, Osinachi Okoro. For her, Jesus is the “Waymaker, miracle worker, promise keeper, **light in the darkness**. My God, that is who You are”. May we not just pitch light against darkness, but rather learn to discover Jesus as light within darkness.

> *"Even in darkness, light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous."* (Psalm 112:4)

The Centenary of St Faith's Church, New Brighton

Alison Regan — March 4th, 2026

Words: Alison Regan + Photos: The Venerable Katrina Hill

In December last year, St Faith's Church on Hawke Street celebrated its centenary. The historic stone building in Gothic revival style was dedicated in November 1925. Prior to this, a wooden mission room known as Beach Church, had occupied that corner site.

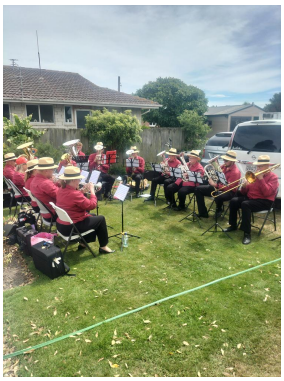
The name of St Faith was chosen via a ballot before the church was dedicated. St Faith was a young Christian martyr of the third and fourth centuries AD, who is honoured in the stained-glass windows on the north side of the church.

In the earthquake of September 2010, the church was undamaged but subsequently suffered extensively in February 2011. For just over 11 years it remained unusable. Services were held firstly in the adjacent hall, then in combined worship in our other parish church, St Luke's in South New Brighton.

In mid 2021, the awaited work of strengthening and restoration began—it was exciting to watch progress over the next months. The church re-opened in May 2022, with an official ceremony and an Open Day on a Saturday, and, following a reading of Mark's gospel on Sunday afternoon, a Eucharist Service led by Bishop Peter Carrell.

The 2025 centenary celebrations were also held over a weekend and all were invited to view the fine selection of memorabilia on display. The weekend buzzed. At the joyous service, made more memorable by a baptism and a confirmation, the singing raised the roof—only metaphorically! Bishop Peter began his sermon by cruising through the decades, asking the congregation to indicate when they had become part of St Faith's: the 1930s was the earliest.

The occasion was rounded off by refreshments in our new lounge. This ancillary building with a kitchen and toilets, is used for meetings, cuppas, the foot clinic, etc. It was largely funded by the generous legacy of parishioner Kath Pickering after whom it is named. The centenary cake was cut by the Bishop, newly-baptised Evin Luke, and Margaret Templeton, who has the longest connection to St Faith's after being baptised there in 1938. Memories were shared to the accompaniment of the New Brighton Silver Band's music on the lawn.



The New Brighton Silver Band's music on the lawn of St Faith's Church. — Image by: Katrina Hill

One of three Pohutukawa trees planted to commemorate the 100th anniversary of St Faith's Church. — Image by: Katrina Hill

To mark the centenary, a trio of Pohutukawa trees was planted. We hope they flourish like our holm oak, planted in 1937 to mark the Coronation of King George VI, and recently added to the

NZ Tree Register.

The trio of Pohutukawa trees planted to commemorate the 100th anniversary of St Faith's Church. — Image by: Katrina Hill

On both of the above occasions – the re-opening and the centenary – visitors enthused over the changes that have made the church a lighter, more open space. Seats have replaced the wooden pews, some of which were high-backed. (A previous vicar is recorded as saying, "I seem to start Mass with an empty church, the congregation miraculously appearing when people stand for the gospel.") Where a bell tower had been intended, a large plain window in memory of Lyall Calvert now faces Hawke Street, giving extra light and a clear connection with the community. Modern doors at the porch entrance, along with updated heating and lighting, have brought the church into the 21st century while keeping heritage features like the three beautiful stained-glass windows in the sanctuary, depicting Jesus' ascension.

HRS Construction received a national award for their excellent restoration work. This would not have been possible without the added insurance money from St Andrew's Church in North New Brighton which merged with the New Brighton Parish in 2020, to become the Anglican Parish of East Christchurch.

Services since 2022 have varied: evenings at first included Scripture, prayer and conversation; gospel services; and Christian movies. To fit with St Luke's 9.30am service time, St Faith's has a service at 11am on Sunday where we combine with our Indian Malayalam-speaking members, communion on Wednesday, and a Taizé service on the first Sunday evening each month.

The church is open at times during the day for people to spend time there, or to find more about us or the community. At the back of the church building is a space for the office of the Brighton Observatory of Environment and Economics (BOEE), a centre for climate change adaptation.

Christmas at St Faith's Church, New Brighton in 2025. — Image by: Katrina Hill

After the February 2011 earthquake, our hall was nominated as a help and resource centre for local folk. Various agencies took up residence. This led to our becoming a community hub, Te Waka Aroha, staffed by community workers and volunteers. TWA offers weekly programmes and activities, e.g. music, craft, exercise, Vege Co-Op, community lunch. People pop in from Monday to Friday for a cuppa and chat. Orange Sky provides laundry facilities weekly. An artisan shed, food pantry, and food truck also grace the grounds.

An article in the Catholic newspaper, the Common Good, states, "hospitality and outreach sit at the heart of the gospel for our time." Our vicar, the Venerable Katrina Hill, agrees:

> "Sharing what we have is good for everyone. We want to empower the people of our community to be the best they can be for each other."